

Leeds Visual Arts Framework

Our ambition

By 2020, Leeds will be recognised as a city where people of all ages have the opportunity to experience high quality contemporary visual art in a variety of distinctive settings. We will commission new work in response to the unique environment that is Leeds and encourage a vibrant and active artist community and a diverse and engaged audience.

This document is written and produced by Leeds Visual Arts Forum (lvaf). It has been initiated with the assistance of Leeds City Council in consultation with the visual arts, education and business sectors. A consultation event was hosted at Leeds Metropolitan University on 31 March 2010.

In 10 years' time

In 10 years' time we want Leeds to be recognised as a city that supports its resident artists, and brings in the best artists to place home grown talent in an international context.

Organisations will encourage the commissioning of new work and provide opportunities to present work, to an engaged and vibrant local and regional audience. The infrastructure will be more developed and there will be an increased number of permanent venues for contemporary art, in

order to underpin more temporary activity (e.g. projects by new graduates and high-profile festivals)

In addition Leeds will become a magnet to attract the cultural tourist for festivals and high profile events. Leeds will have a profile that is synonymous with excellence in the visual arts.

Aims

The main aim of this framework is to explore and plan out how to create a thriving environment for the visual arts and to find Leeds's distinctive visual arts identity in terms of presentation of artwork, artists' support and audience development.

To achieve this aim we will need to:

1. develop and strengthen partnerships and collaboration within the existing visual arts infrastructure
2. develop partnerships and engagement with the business sector
3. raise the profile of the contemporary visual arts through a sustained marketing plan
4. develop new audiences through increased participation and engagement
5. support individual artists, new graduates and assist their sustainability by encouraging and supporting the establishment of new spaces
6. advocate the benefits of the visual arts to partners in the city to achieve greater impact and reach.

Current context

one of the most interesting sites of radical thought and experimental arts outside London' - Alfred Orage and The Leeds Art Club 1893-1923 - Tom Steele

Leeds has a rich visual arts heritage; Henry Moore Institute, internationally recognised as the centre of the study of British Sculpture, Leeds Art Gallery and Leeds Art Club and yet today it is a city better known for its cultural provision in the performing arts

Leeds benefits from having a compact city centre that brings in visitors to experience its lively retail offer and night scene. However its reputation for the visual arts is less known. There is much that happens within Leeds, but the visual arts are poorly marketed and not recognised as a driver for inward investment or tourism.

It does have:

- A track record of commissioning and presenting artwork in unusual spaces [Light Night, Situation Leeds, Art in Unusual Places, Secrets and Light]
- Gallery spaces [Henry Moore Institute, Leeds Art Gallery, PSL, Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, Leeds College of Art Gallery]
- Strong art collections and resources on visual art [Leeds Art Gallery, HMI]
- Two HE institutions with resident organisations [Pavilion, Leeds Met Gallery & Studio Theatre]
- Over 300 graduates each year leave HE as visual art practitioners
- Good studio provision for artists to practice, network, present work and continue professional development

[East Street Arts, Leeds Sculpture Workshop, Jackson's Yard]

- A tradition of fluid independent activity including Woolgather, Slice, Mexico Project Space, Testspace and Enjoy
- National profile through the Northern Art Prize
- An enthusiastic and engaged audience [Light Night, Northern Art Prize]
- Good agencies that could promote the visual arts [Culture Vulture and Anita Morris Associates]
- Ivaf– a network of artists and arts professionals.

However, Leeds does not capitalise on what the visual arts brings to the city:

- The art scene is fragmented
- There is no established and sustained commercial gallery structure
- Leeds Art Gallery does not have the capacity to display all its collections.
- There is a competitive rather than a collaborative network
- There is no champion, particularly within the political arena
- There is little joined up marketing and profile building
- Several arts organisations have lost their Arts Council England funding [Pavilion, The Culture Company, Leeds Met Gallery and Studio Theatre].

Our audience

There is an existing and growing audience for the visual arts as demonstrated by the appetite to attend flagship events such as the Northern Art Prize and Light Night. However there is huge potential to increase the size of this audience and encourage those who only occasionally engage with the visual arts to take part.

The audience for this framework is:

- Politicians responsible for developing and defining what is special about Leeds
- All those responsible for the delivery of Leeds Cultural Strategy
- Visual artists and students to enable them to understand the visual arts infrastructure better
- Other artforms and artists to understand where the visual arts can add value
- Local audiences as well as regional and national audiences.
- Marketing agencies such as Welcome To Yorkshire and Marketing Leeds

Our partners are:

- All organisations that present and promote visual art/artists in the city
- Leeds City Council
- HE institutions
- Key politicians
- The business sector
- The retail sector
- Arts Council England
- Marketing Leeds
- Welcome to Yorkshire
- Turning Point
- Contemporary Art Society.

How we will achieve this

Lvaf will become a strong network and advocate for the visual arts with a paid coordinator, liaising with artists, arts organisations, arts professionals as well as the City Council, and national initiatives such as Turning Point.

The Leeds arts constituency will pull together to make this happen, with organisations confident with their own identity and able to collaborate effectively with others, signing up to a brand that is uniquely Leeds.

We will attract artists to live, work and show their work in Leeds, to keep artists currently resident here, retain new graduates and encourage artists to relocate to Leeds.

We will establish Leeds as a happening place for the visual arts, building on and sharing our current audiences, reaching new ones and attracting visitors from the region and beyond.

We will create a central hub for the visual arts that becomes not only a source of information but a regular meeting place for those interested in and wanting to know more about what is happening in the city.

We will be recognised internationally for nurturing and retaining talent graduating from the three HE institutions, providing opportunities for these emerging artists to present work in a national and international context. We will develop mentoring and internship opportunities with established artists, galleries and curators to encourage the development of skills and expertise.

We will be ambitious and build on the reputation and success of The Northern Art

Prize and its critically engaged and growing audience by bidding to host national visual arts events – Turner Prize, New Contemporaries, British Art Show. This will require a strong network of galleries building on the current infrastructure – Leeds Art Gallery, HMI, Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, PSL, East Street Arts – as well as a network of organisations that present work across different sites.

There will be a strong political champion within Leeds City Council who will recognise the benefits that a vibrant and active visual arts sector can bring to the city and will use his/her influence to support new initiatives.

We will continue to utilise unused space within the city for the use of artists [Art In Unusual Spaces] – working with Leeds City Council in partnership with the private sector.

We will develop a promotional and media strategy, working with Welcome to Yorkshire and Marketing Leeds to get the message across. We will develop an art map for Leeds (both physical and digital with mobile and tablet applications) to assist the cultural tourist to find and engage with exhibitions and events.

We will promote a regular ‘festival’ of visual arts in partnership with the private sector, showing off Leeds talent and commissioning key inter/national artists to make new work, building on Situation Leeds. We will be brave and innovative, building on the success of the Cultural Olympiad 2012 project ‘OverWorlds & UnderWorlds’ with the Brothers Quay.

We will develop large scale events that reclaim the city such as Light Night, open up

artists’ studios and exhibitions and venues late night.

The City Council will support new commercial initiatives by incentivising start up agencies, to encourage entrepreneurs to develop retail visual arts initiatives.

We will work with the Contemporary Arts Society and Arts Council England to examine the potential for developing the knowledge base about who is making/presenting work in the city, as well as encouraging critical debate, buying and collecting of art.

The action plan

2012

- Lvaf is positioned and supported as the lead to drive action forward and evaluate and monitor progress on behalf of the sector
- Leeds City Council recognises the importance of this framework and agrees to offer strategic support and funds to develop plans
- Lvaf appoints a part-time co-ordinator with funds from Leeds City Council and Arts Council G4A.
- Leeds City Council commissions an audience development strategy for the visual arts
- Marketing Leeds develops a promotion and marketing plan for the visual arts to raise its profile
- City Councillors assist in profiling the visual arts
- Key partners to start conversations nationally aiming to bring in a high level event such as the British Art Show to Leeds
- Lvaf discusses potential of commercial and collector development with Contemporary Art Society personnel in NW and NE.
- The Brothers Quay event tracks audiences within a robust evaluation framework.
- Leeds City Council adopts a strategy that encourages entrepreneurs to set up commercial initiatives offering rates concessions and suitable space with low rent.

2013

- Axis is commissioned to develop a citywide art map app for mobile and tablet platforms (as they have done for Cardiff)
- A central meeting place is established as hub for information on the visual arts and regular informal talks/discussions
- A monthly programme of talks and critical debate is established linked to programme – e.g. last Thursdays twilight sessions
- A monthly 'First Wednesdays' where all visual arts organisations stay open late on the first Wednesday of every month
- Leeds City Council continues to enable empty spaces to be adopted by artists to present work – Art in Unusual Spaces.